



MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

Nancy Floreen
Council President

March 2, 2010

The Honorable Ulysses Currie
Chairman, Budget and Taxation Committee
Senate Office Building, 3 West Wing
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Sheila E. Hixson
Chairman, Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 131
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Senate Bill 717 / House Bill 832 - *The Lorraine Sheehan Health and
Community Services Act of 2010*

Dear Chairman Currie and Chairman Hixson:

We are writing to strongly urge you to support Senate Bill 717, *The Lorraine Sheehan Health and Community Services Act of 2010*, and its counterpart House Bill 832. Both bills would effectively increase Maryland's alcohol tax by a dime a drink.

According to the recent study by Professors David Jernigan and Hugh Waters of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, this increase will save many Maryland lives and hundreds of millions of dollars by reducing alcohol abuse. In addition, we are very pleased that the legislation proposes to use the \$214 million in estimated revenue to fund critical unmet needs.

Poll after poll shows that the overwhelming majority of Marylanders support increasing the state's alcohol tax, which has not been raised since 1972 and is currently among the lowest in the nation (47th among the 50 states). The same polls also indicate that Marylanders especially support an increase when they are assured the money will be used to address the critical needs described in the bills. Given the strong level of support that exists for this issue, we hope that you will do all you can to enact this measure this year.

Like all of you in Annapolis, we are acutely aware of the difficult balancing act we face currently in managing our fiscal affairs, during these extraordinary economic times. As County Executive and County Council President, we absolutely understand the concerns of residents and businesses that have been hit hard by the recession and are opposed to raising taxes.

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We have been firmly committed to holding the line on taxes, as we have worked over the past three years in office to close very large budget gaps – with another significant gap facing the County for the coming year. But we have also not been shy or reluctant, despite the politics involved, to voice our support for targeted tax increases that have far-reaching health or environmental benefits and help to raise revenue for critical needs. Our continued support for an increase in the state gasoline tax and our support for past increases in the cigarette tax are two examples.


Simply put, the proposed alcohol tax increase is long overdue and the right thing to do.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Isiah Leggett
County Executive



Nancy Floreen
Council President

IL/pl

cc: The Honorable Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr.
The Honorable Michael E. Busch
Members, Montgomery County Delegation